

SUICIDE in ADULTHOOD: *Prevention & Intervention*

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Workshop Overview

- Suicide “101”
- Overview of Risk Factors
- Prominent Risk Factors for the Middle Aged & Elderly
- Warning Signs
- Prevention
- Implications for Prevention Programs



Suicide 101

- 11th Leading Cause of Death
- 30-31,000 / year in U.S.
- 600 – 700,000 attempts/ year in U.S.
- Rates Rise with Age
- Males Complete about 4 Times as Often as Females
- 90% Have Diagnosable Psychiatric Disorder
 - Co-morbidity
- Elderly Caucasian Males Generally have the Highest Rates



Suicide as the “Perfect Storm”

- Genetic Factors
- Biological Factors
- Personality
- Past Experience
- Life Stressors
- Lack of Interpersonal Connectedness
- Social Issues
- Opportunity/ Access to Means



Overview of General Risk Factors

■ Previous Attempts

- Especially multiple attempts

■ Presence of Psychiatric Disorder

- Esp. mood disorders and substance abuse

■ Hopelessness

■ Suicidal Ideation and Intent

■ Exposure to Suicide

- Esp. family hx.

■ Isolation



Overview of General Risk Factors

- Trauma History
- Resolved Plans And Preparations
- Perceived Burdensomeness
- Perceived Lack Of Belonging
- Access to Means



Risk Assessment:

Additional Risk Markers

- Psychotic processes (thought disorder)
- Significant physiological dysregulation
- Agitation/ anxiety/ panic
- Recent discharge from psychiatric facility
- Distress at failure to complete after a suicide attempt



Warning Signs of Imminent Risk: *A Mnemonic*

IS PATH WARM

- Ideation
- Substance Abuse
- Purposelessness
- Anxiety
- Trapped
- Hopelessness
- Withdrawing
- Anger
- Recklessness
- Mood Changes



Warning Signs

■ Dysregulation

- Sleep, eating, weight-loss, lack of self-care

■ Suicidal Ideation

- Plan – lethality, specificity, practicality
- Frequency, intensity, duration

■ Preparation & Rehearsal (Taking Action)

- Seeking access to means
- Rehearsing
- Recklessness



Warning Signs

- Leave-taking

- Communication of Suicidal Wish/
Intent

 - Wish to die

 - Fore-shortened future

 - Overt suicide threat



Risk Factors for Middle Aged Adults & the Elderly

■ Depression

- Sadness, guilt, pessimism, anhedonia, sleep problems, loss of appetite, hopelessness, irritability, poor concentration
- Substance abuse with depression greatly increases risk
- Association of depression & suicide increases with age

■ Life transitions

- Loss of role status & functioning
- Retirement
- Financial / legal difficulties

■ Recent interpersonal loss or separation



Risk Factors for the Elderly

■ Illness

- Pain
- Neurological, cancer, seizures, loss of vision, dyspnea
- Also, recent Dx. & perception of illness
 - Threatened loss of function/control and heightened dependency
- Functional impairment, eg. loss of vision

■ Personality Traits/ Coping Style

- Rigidity of coping style, lack of openness to new experience, and reluctance to seek help

■ Access to Means

- Especially firearms & medications

■ Perceived Burdensomeness

■ Isolation

- Lack of a confidant
- Lack on membership in social organizations (e.g., church, Elks, etc.)

■ Recent spousal loss



Prevention

■ Cultural Barriers to Prevention

- Ageism
- Normality of depression, even suicidality, in the elderly
- Taboo about asking about suicide
- Non-acceptability of help-seeking

■ Raising General Community Awareness

■ Education of Gate Keepers

- Clergy
- Funeral professionals
- VNA
- Medical Personnel

■ Increasing Accessibility of Services

- E.g., including behavioral health services in primary care



Prevention Strategies

- Mental Health Collaboration with Primary Care Physician
 - PROSPECT Program
- Outreach Programs
 - Telephone based social support/ contact
 - Bereavement support programs



SUMMARY - *General Principles of Prevention Programs*

- Buy-in Of Key Leadership in the Community
- Destigmatization Of Psychiatric Disorder & Suicide
- Raising Awareness Of Risk And Warning Signs
- Prescribing Appropriate Response to Risk
- Screening, Detection, and Outreach to At-risk Individuals
- Facilitating Help-seeking & Access to Services
- Appropriate Follow-through With Services
- Lowering General Risk Factors And Increasing Protective Factors (e.g. - Social Connection)



Suggestions About Prevention for Adults and the Elderly

- Anything That Reduces Isolation
- Aggressive Identification & Rx. Of Depression
- Screening Through Medical Delivery System



Suggestions About Prevention for Adults and the Elderly

■ Workplace Awareness

- Esp. of impact of job loss

■ Bereavement Care

- Education of bereavement caregivers




- Funeral Directors
- Clergy
- Medical providers

- Increase availability of bereavement support services

- Support groups
- Internet
- One to one outreach/ contact
- Identification of complicated/ prolonged grief reactions



Wrap-Up

-  Questions?
-  Comments?
-  Discussion?

